1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

There is no record of any form of execution, though it has been known for the aged and infirm, too sick to care for themselves, or for those suspected of being possessed of supernatural powers, to disappear or to die of some strange sickness, under unusual circumstances. It was Putnam's opinion that such deaths might have been occasioned deliberately, but he had no means of verification. [114]

INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC LIFE

Exact Knowledge

Counting

Putnam mentions the use of finger signs in counting and the Mbuti habit of counting in pairs. Despite this simplicity, however, they are able to assess quantity accurately and speedily, as witnessed by their dexterity in their favorite gambling game in which beans are thrown onto a mat. The success of the throw depends on whether or not a combination of four results. The Pygmy knows at a glance whether he has to throw in an extra bean or slip one out in order to make the necessary adjustment. If there is disagreement, the beans are checked in pairs of pairs.

Medicine

Putnam frequently tried to copy the preparation of poisons used by the net hunters on

[P. 231-D]

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

561 [433] although once again the general pattern in no way implies an invariable rule.

[854] Infants sometimes accompany their mother on her activities, or are left in camp in the charge of youths or elders of either sex.

561 857 Children who do not stay in the *bopi* to play or to imitate adult activities accompany their parents according to sex; however, boys who cannot do much more than walk will, on the hunt, be more likely to accompany their mother. Children up to the age of puberty frequently prepare meals for themselves, not only in the process of "playing house" but also when together as a group. They go together to the streams to fish or crab, to the forest to gather and maybe to hunt for small or slow game, and together they cook and eat these foods. Older children may also co-operate in building a bachelor hut, though more often they will occupy one that has been abandoned, if they want one at all. But even before puberty they are beginning to help on the hunt, the girls with the beating and the boys with guarding the extremities of the nets.

561 883 After puberty the activities of youths are temporarily closer to those of their parents, causing some friction and disaffection, particularly between fathers and sons. The sibling groups, however, are reunited; youths now have activities and responsibilities comparable to those of their older married brothers and sisters. It is the younger married couples and the older youths who are primarily responsible for hunting and gathering, not only for food but also for the other material necessities of life, such as saplings and leaves for the huts, bark for clothing, wood for the fires. It is also this age group that manufactures, without any other form of specialization, the entire limited range of artifacts that constitutes Mbuti material culture.

[463]

561 887 589 The older couples, widows and widowers, retire with regret but without shame or stigma from communal life, and to the end they will act in divers useful ways, in particular looking after children left in the camp while the rest of the band is off on the hunt. Older people also spend a great deal of their time making the twine used in hunting nets, plaiting vine belts and preparing food. They can expect to be fed by the rest of the band, regardless of its kinship composition, and at the same time they are free to undertake whatever individual hunting and gathering they can. The sick or crippled enjoy similar status, being also unable to keep up with the rigors of the hunt. That such people are regarded as a potential danger to society is seen in the legends of old and crippled people who die or who disappear or who

[283]

732 734

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

become spirits, but there is no evidence of the old or crippled actually being treated with anything but a care and respect that, judging from appearances, derives more from affection and a sense of responsibility (not unmixed with a certain amount of rare forethought) rather than from fear.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

The iron tools available to the Mbuti since the inception of their relationship with the village tribes have not, apparently, tempted them to develop their hunting technology. They do not dig pits or make traps, nor do they erect spear-falls, techniques employed by the villagers. To make their traditional technology more efficient, however, the Mbuti do use iron blades for their spears, axes, knives and arrow blades. The spear blade makes the hunting of elephants much easier, though old Mbuti assert that they used to kill elephants with fire-hardened wooden spears. The knives and machetes undoubtedly make the cutting of leaves, saplings and vines much quicker and easier, and the honey ax affords simple access to beehives deep within hollow branches or tree trunks. The arrow tip is used more by the archers than by the net-hunters, it seems, but both groups rely primarily on poisoned arrows. The bows of neither group are large or efficient, accuracy is made doubly difficult by the limited vision of the forest environment, and hunters often aim at a sound or a movement of leaves rather than by sight of the actual quarry. With the poisoned arrow even a light graze will bring down the quarry, whereas with the metal-tipped arrow direct impact on a vital spot is essential. Even so, so chancy is Mbuti archery that throughout the forest the practice is to hold a handful of arrows in the hand that holds the bow; this enables them to be drawn and fired with remarkable rapidity. Naturally many are lost, but the loss of a poisoned arrow is of far less economic significance than the loss of a metal tip.

Traditional hunting techniques include archery, net-hunting and spear hunting, and occasional snaring (usually by youths, sometimes by old men). Nets vary in length from one to three hundred feet, and are about four feet in height. Seven small nets, together with beaters, might form a circle of over one hundred yards in diameter. Any area smaller than this would be impractical, as the game would be scared away before the nets could be set up and the beaters get in place. Even seven nets of average length would only form a circle barely two hun-

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

otherwise would have followed him without question, but Masisi was adamant. He said he was going anyway; whether anyone else came or not did not worry him. His cousin, Manyalibo, was in a quandary. Morally he was bound to support his relative, but he was tempted by Ekianga's idea of getting the best of both worlds. Visions of both meat and honey won, and he announced that he was going with Ekianga.

Masisi with the true Pygmy sense of drama said that Manyalibo was a disgrace, and that as everyone else obviously wanted to behave like villagers he would go off on his own. In a loud dramatic voice he commanded his wife to pack her belongings. Within an hour or so they set off, followed by their two children, Akobo and Ageronga. There was some discussion after they had left, and Njobo's sister, Teningbenge, and her son Maipe, decided to follow Masisi. With them went Masamba, Njobo's wife; Njobo himself was still in Bunia with his son, Nyange, looking after the boy who was being treated for severe tuberculosis of the bone. The next to follow them was old Asofalinda, who said that she wanted nothing to do with her brother Ekianga. If Ekianga intended to waste his honey season hunting, he could do so without her. This somewhat counterbalanced Manyalibo's desertion of Masisi, and everyone thought it a great idea. She packed her few things together and set off, still denouncing Ekianga as a fool. She carried her crippled little daughter on her side and her bundle slung over her back. Lizabeti was a pathetic child whose hip had been diseased since birth. She had never walked but had spent her ten years of life crawling around on her buttocks, dragging one withered leg after her, using the other leg and her two hands to swing her body along as she vainly tried to follow other children in their games. Mambunia, Masisi's brother, himself with a leg twisted by infantile paralysis, went limping after Asofalinda, shouting that he would come and help her carry Lizabeti. As he left, clutching a spear in one hand, he told me that Masisi would

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

all we could carry to bring back for dinner. The hill was ringed with streams, each one fresh and clear until it reached the swamp.

On the way back, having made a complete circuit, we were just nearing the camp when I noticed a huge old tree, one of those with great buttress roots joining the trunk some fifteen feet above the ground. It was completely dead, standing up white and naked among all the greenery, its lifelessness seeming all the more pitiable in the midst of such luxuriance. Most of its branches had already come crashing down, and only one or two jagged stumps were still jutting out from the main body. Kenge gave it a critical look; then peered in the direction of the camp a few yards below. "It should just miss our house!" he said quite seriously.

As a matter of fact it did. One night we were awakened by a sharp cracking sound, followed by a loud groan. This was repeated, and after a while a number of Pygmies, each with a flaming brand in his hands, stood out in the clearing, listening. "It's not going to fall yet," they said, and went back to sleep. Kenge had not even bothered to get up, but I could not sleep. I must have laid there for a couple of hours, listening to cracks as sharp as a rifle going off, and the intermittent groaning. Then the groaning got louder and more continuous, and in a flash Kenge was up and outside, yelling at me to follow. Just as I cleared the doorway the old tree came down, slowly and reluctantly, clutching at all the lesser trees that stood in its way. They were living, and it was dead, but it smashed its way on downward to the ground. The tremendous din of its collapse was followed by a light pattering of broken branches and twigs, and then silence. Kenge said, "You see, it did miss our house." So it had, by no more than six feet.

For the first day or two I noticed the children playing in a vine swing that they had rigged up for themselves, and I watched the crippled Lizabeti as she eyed them longingly. Several times, when the other children had gone scampering off into the forest I saw her

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

pull herself over to the swing, slowly and painfully, and hoist herself almost upright by catching onto the vine with her hands, using what strength she had left in her good leg, which was fast withering through lack of use. It suddenly occurred to me to ask Kenge why Pygmies never made crutches. He said that they either got better with the use of a stick, or else they just crawled until they died. "What good is anyone who can't walk?" he asked.

I went to Asofalinda and asked her if she would let me try to teach Lizabeti to walk on crutches. The old woman was in one of her most truculent moods and severely said no. The white doctor had tried once, and Lizabeti had only got worse. Besides, the one leg was completely disjointed now, she said, and the other would be equally useless soon. I tried to explain that I was not going to try to cure the girl but just to help her get around more easily. Asofalinda asked me what crutches were like, but then she immediately became severe again and said that everyone knew it was impossible to walk on one leg.

I went off into the forest with Kenge and we cut two pairs of crutches, carefully choosing sticks with a wide fork that would not pinch under the arm. Then we cut a third pair, the right size for Lizabeti. We padded the forks with leaves. I showed Kenge how to use them, holding one leg doubled up behind me. He was delighted and was soon swinging himself unsteadily over the ground. When I thought that we both had had enough practice we returned to the camp and showed the sticks to Asofalinda, explaining them to her. We then performed, circling the camp twice without mishap. By this time the children were shrieking encouragement, and parents came running to see what the noise was all about. We performed once again for Masisi. When Asofalinda still hesitated Masisi simply went into her hut, grabbed the terrified Lizabeti and carried her outside. He told Asofalinda that this was not medicine, it was just common

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

734 481 123 sense, and she must not refuse. Did she want her child to die like other cripples who had been unable to fend for themselves?

Reluctantly she agreed, but Lizabeti, as soon as I reached for her, burst into tears and dragged herself back into the farthest corner of her mother's hut. Masisi started to go in after her again, but Kenge called to him to leave her alone, and handed his crutches and those we had made for Lizabeti to the eagerly waiting children. Soon it was the most popular game in the camp. Even Masisi and Maipe tried "walking on one leg." I saw Lizabeti's tear-stained face peering from the door of her hut to watch.

The next morning Asofalinda came over to me and said that Lizabeti wanted to try this new game, but if she fell once she would never be allowed to try again. Not a soul left the camp that morning; they all wanted to see what would happen. Between us Kenge and I lifted the girl, who was bravely trying not to cry, and put the crutches under her arms. We showed her how to hold them with her hands at the sides, and how to take the weight off her good leg and swing it backward and forward. The greatest difficulty was getting her to trust that leg enough to move her crutches on in front of her. But little by little, moving one crutch at a time, she got more confidence. I went in front to catch her if she fell, and Kenge held her lightly around the waist from behind. Lizabeti began to walk. Kenge let go, and then, as she realized that Kenge was not even holding her, that she was actually walking upright, like the other children she had watched from the ground all her life, her face became contorted with fear and she stumbled. Kenge caught her just in time. He swung her high into the air with a triumphant shout to drown her wails of terror, and all the children joined in, laughing and chanting their congratulations.

734 481 123 152 We had almost completed a circle of the camp, and I looked over to see if Asofalinda had noticed Lizabeti start to fall. I was just in time to see her bury her face in her hands, her whole body shaking as she

3t Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

sobbed her heart out—probably for the first time in her wonderful, hard-bitten old life.

The days that followed were full of happiness for everyone. Once Lizabeti got over her fright I made her practice regularly, to give her more strength in her good leg. She was soon able to stand up by herself, using the crutches for a lever. Not once did she fall. And the other children cut themselves crutches so that they could join in the fun, and together they found a new world of delight. When I was not coaxing Lizabeti to use her crutches more and more, someone else was, for everyone was anxious to see her fly over the ground just like Kenge, who by now was a master acrobat on his crutches, from which he refused to be parted.

In other respects, however, the camp became less pleasant, at any rate for me. The bees began to come in droves after their stolen honey. All day long they buzzed angrily around, so that we kept smoky fires in our huts night and day.

Almost every hour someone returned from a secret forage, with leaf bundles tied to his belt, dripping the sticky liquid down his legs. Sometimes it was too liquefied to be eaten, and then the whole bundle was simply dipped into a bowl of clear forest water, making a sweet-tasting drink. But far more popular was the whole comb which could be eaten grubs, larvae, bees and all. If it was very hard, it was first softened over the fire, and this made the grubs squirm more actively so that the honey worked its own way down your throat. It was, however, the best-tasting honey of all, despite the insects.

Apuma was yet another kind of honey, which came later in the season. It was full of grubs too, but they were all dead, and the honey had fermented. It was made by a different kind of bee and tasted like a bitter liqueur; if eaten in any quantity it could be highly intoxicating. But the Pygmy needs no stimulant in the honey season. He is drunk with the forest, with its beauty and abundance, and with the love it showers on its people. Every night that tiny